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Viewing cable 06MANAGUA2225, NICARAGUAN PRESIDENTIAL POLLS -- WHAT DO THE

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Understanding cables

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- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

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If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#06MANAGUA2225**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
06MANAGUA2225	2006-10-07 00:00	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Managua

Appears in these articles:

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/03/2016
TAGS: [EAID](#) [KDEM](#) [NU](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#)
SUBJECT: NICARAGUAN PRESIDENTIAL POLLS -- WHAT DO THE
NUMBERS MEAN?

Classified By: Ambassador Paul A. Trivelli. Reasons 1.4 (B,D).

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The presidential polls from March to the most recent in September all point to the likelihood of a runoff in the November 5 presidential election. From poll to poll the candidates have gained and lost percentage points, but none of the candidates has attained the level (40 percent or 35 percent and 5 percent over the next closest candidate) required to win on the first round. Although Sandinista Liberation Front (FSLN) candidate Daniel Ortega was well in the lead in June and July polls, Nicaraguan Liberal Alliance (ALN) candidate Eduardo Montealegre has gained on him in the past few weeks. The polls show that Ortega and Liberal Constitutional Party (PLC) candidate Jose Rizo are still the strongest players among the rural population. The Sandinista Renovation Movement (MRS) suffered a setback after presidential candidate Herty Lewites' sudden death, but the party has gained back some points after an initial loss in the polls and their numbers seem to have stabilized. Sample sizes and methodologies vary for each poll and must be taken into account when analyzing the results. The percentage of voters who declare they are undecided remains high and these are the voters who may determine the outcome of the November 5 election. END SUMMARY.

THE NUMBERS

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2. (C) Surveys -- intention for presidential vote

09/06 - M&R Consultants
Daniel Ortega -- 30.9%
Eduardo Montealegre -- 26.4%
Herty Lewites/Edmundo Jarquin -- 15.9%
Jose Rizo -- 16.3%
Undecided -- 9.6%

09/06 - Greenberg Consultants
Daniel Ortega -- 29%
Eduardo Montealegre -- 27%
Herty Lewites/Edmundo Jarquin -- 19%
Jose Rizo -- 16%
Undecided -- 7%

09/06 - M&R (phone)
Daniel Ortega -- 16.7%
Eduardo Montealegre -- 36.2%
Herty Lewites/Edmundo Jarquin -- 19.7%
Jose Rizo -- 11.7%
Undecided -- 16.2%

08/06 - Borges y Asociados (ByA)
Daniel Ortega -- 26.8%
Eduardo Montealegre -- 23.9%
Herty Lewites/Edmundo Jarquin -- 19.1%
Jose Rizo -- 16.4%
Undecided -- 13.3%

08/06 - New Link
Daniel Ortega -- 28%
Eduardo Montealegre -- 21%
Herty Lewites/Edmundo Jarquin -- 12%
Jose Rizo -- 15%
Undecided -- 23%

08/06 - CID Gallup
Daniel Ortega -- 28.7%
Eduardo Montealegre -- 22.8%
Herty Lewites/Edmundo Jarquin -- 14.2%
Jose Rizo -- 13.5%
Undecided -- 19.1%

08/06 - M&R
Daniel Ortega -- 32.1%
Eduardo Montealegre -- 25.0%
Herty Lewites/Edmundo Jarquin -- 19.9%
Jose Rizo -- 13.7%
Undecided -- 8.0%

08/06 - ByA
Daniel Ortega -- 27.5%
Eduardo Montealegre -- 24.8%
Herty Lewites/Edmundo Jarquin -- 17.1%
Jose Rizo -- 18.6%
Undecided -- 11.1%

07/06 - ByA
Daniel Ortega -- 31.4%
Eduardo Montealegre -- 29.1%
Herty Lewites/Edmundo Jarquin -- 15.2%
Jose Rizo -- 15.7%
Undecided -- 7.6%

06/06 - ByA
Daniel Ortega -- 30.1%
Eduardo Montealegre -- 24.4%
Herty Lewites/Edmundo Jarquin -- 17.2%
Jose Rizo -- 21.6%
Undecided -- 5.8%

06/06 - CID Gallup
Daniel Ortega -- 23%
Eduardo Montealegre -- 17%
Herty Lewites/Edmundo Jarquin -- 15%
Jose Rizo -- 11%
Undecided -- 32%

05/06 - M&R
Daniel Ortega -- 27.2%
Eduardo Montealegre -- 27.9%
Herty Lewites/Edmundo Jarquin -- 13.3%
Jose Rizo -- 13.3%
Undecided -- 12.5%

05/06 - ByA
Daniel Ortega -- 28.7%
Eduardo Montealegre -- 27.0%
Herty Lewites/Edmundo Jarquin -- 13.3%
Jose Rizo -- 17.0%
Undecided -- 12.1%

EARLY POLLS
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13. (U) Early surveys, such as the Borges y Asociados
countrywide poll conducted in early May, showed a small gap
between Ortega and Montealegre -- Ortega leading with 28.7
percent, followed by Eduardo Montealegre with 27 percent.

Poll results when analyzed by department, showed that Ortega was strong in Managua, Carazo, Nueva Segovia, Madriz, Jinotega, Esteli, Chontales, the RAAN, Rio San Juan and Matagalpa. In contrast, Montealegre was stronger in typically Sandinista Leon, as well as in Masaya, Granada, Rivas, Chinandega, Boaco and the RAAS.

¶4. (U) Ortega's numbers began to climb in June, while support for other candidates dropped, as highlighted in the CID Gallup poll, conducted June 16-23. Ortega's numbers rose to 23% versus 16% in April, while support for the other candidates dropped: Montealegre 17% versus 22% in April; Lewites 15% versus 18% in April; and Rizo: 11% versus 13% in April. Support was also strong for the FSLN as a party. In a Borges y Asociados countrywide poll conducted between June 20 and July 2 Nicaraguans were asked about their party preferences (without using the names of the Presidential candidates) and the FSLN was clearly ahead with 30.6% followed by the PLC (24.2%), the ALN (17.7%), the MRS (11.3%) and the AC (.78%).

¶5. (U) The earlier polls also showed preferences among voters by education level and department that still hold true in more recent surveys. The Borges y Asociados pollsters compared education levels of the respondents, and among those who supported the FSLN, 33.5% had only completed a primary education in contrast to those who supported Lewites (11% had a primary education and 22% has a university education). Respondents with no education overwhelmingly favored Rizo and Ortega. The poll also measured the candidates' popularity among urban versus rural populations. Ortega, Montealegre and the MRS led in urban areas, whereas Ortega and Rizo were stronger in rural areas.

RECENT POLLS - - - - -

¶6. (SBU) M&R, August -- According to the M&R Consultants nationwide poll conducted August 4 - 10 (sample size 4,020) Ortega was in the lead with 32.1%, followed by Montealegre 25.0%, Jarquin (19.9%), Rizo (13.7%) and Pastora (1.3%). If the election goes to a second round, Montealegre would win over Ortega, according to poll results. Of those polled, 8% said they would not vote or declined to respond. If it is

assumed that those 8% would not vote, Ortega could win. The adjusted figures (without the 8%) are: Ortega (34.9%), Montealegre (27.2%), Jarquin (21.6%), Rizo (14.9%) and Pastora (1.4%). According to regional breakdowns, Ortega is still strongest in urban and rural areas. Montealegre has the advantage on the Atlantic Coast and in the center of the country. Also according to the poll, if the elections were held tomorrow, none of the parties would win enough seats to control the National Assembly.

¶7. (C) CID Gallup, August -- showed Ortega in the lead with 29%, followed by Montealegre with 23%, Rizo (14%), Jarquin (14%) and Pastora (1%). The nationwide poll, conducted August 16 - 19, had a sample size of 1,258 people, all with cedula. Of the people polled, 19% said they were undecided. Of note is that on a second round, according to the poll, Montealegre, Rizo and Jarquin would all beat Ortega. (COMMENT: The press ran articles highlighting Ortega's lead and declaring him the probable victor, but they were based on the assumption that the 19% of undecided voters will either abstain from voting or that some will vote for Ortega. In the past, the undecided (or those who simply declined to reveal who they plan to vote for) do not vote FSLN or PLC. A majority of the 19% will go to Montealegre or Jarquin. END COMMENT.)

¶8. (C) ALN Commissioned Poll, August -- A private poll conducted by New Link Political (protect) for the ALN showed FSLN presidential candidate Daniel Ortega with the highest vote intention but with ALN candidate Eduardo Montealegre winning in a second round. Ortega polled highest with 28% of the vote, followed by Montealegre (21%), Rizo (15%), Jarquin (10%), and Pastora (1%). Seventeen percent were undecided.

Montealegre, who the poll showed as being able to capture the most votes from other candidates, would defeat Ortega in a runoff election 35% to 32%, though the other candidates would lose to Ortega. About 32% of respondents indicated that they would consider voting for a presidential candidate and deputy candidates from different parties, most preferring Montealegre.

¶9. (C) MRS Commissioned Poll, September -- A private poll commissioned by the MRS shows Montealegre a close second to Ortega. MRS spokesperson Israel Lewites provided Poloff with a copy of the latest Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research poll (August 26 - September 2; 1,000 respondents, of them 746 likely to vote). Greenberg, which is providing consulting serving to the MRS campaign, concluded the following: of the 1,000 respondents: 29% would vote for Ortega, 27% for Montealegre, 19% for Jarquin, 16% for Rizo, and 6% undecided. Of the 746 respondents most likely to vote: 32% would vote for Ortega, 28% for Montealegre, 20% for Jarquin, and 18% for Rizo. (COMMENT: Unlike other polls that the PLC can claim are financed by Montealegre, the Greenberg poll, if anything, should favor Jarquin, not Montealegre. The fact that this poll tracks with the other polls lends credence to these trends. END COMMENT.)

¶10. (C) PLC Commissioned Poll, September -- CID Gallup fielded a small anonymous (without the CID Gallup name) proprietary poll at the request of the PLC. The net results of the poll, tracked fairly closely with CID Gallup's last poll, and in fact showed Montealegre consolidating and improving, Rizo improving a bit, Jarquin slipping, and Ortega holding at the same level. When asked who would they would vote for right now, 28 percent of respondents indicated Ortega. Montealegre garnered 24 percent, followed by Rizo (16%), Jarquin (12%) and Pastora (1%). Nineteen percent were undecided.

¶11. (C) M&R phone poll, September -- According to an M&R poll released September 11 (poll conducted on September 7-8, sample size 802 nationwide, 3.5% error), 35.2% of the respondents believe Montealegre will be the next president of Nicaragua; 22.3% think Ortega will win; 18.6% are uncertain or did not respond; 12.5% believe Jarquin will win; 11.1% think Rizo will be the next president; and, only .1% think Pastora has a chance. Regarding voter preference, Montealegre gained 36.2%, Jarquin 19.2%, Ortega 16.7%, Rizo 11.1% and Pastora .1%. Undecided/no response totaled 16.2%. (COMMENT: The results of the poll are encouraging, however, the sample size is very small and respondents polled outside Managua were all queried by phone, thus limiting the type of person who could respond, excluding poorer rural voters who tend to favor Ortega or Rizo. It should also be noted that this poll is an extreme outlier in relation to the other polls. END COMMENT.)

LATEST POLL
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¶12. M&R, September -- According to the M&R poll released September 29, Ortega (30.9%) and Montealegre (26.4%) are the two leading candidates followed by Rizo (16.3%), Jarquin (15.9%) and Pastora (0.9%). The percentage of people who will not vote or are still undecided is 9.6%. The poll was conducted between September 15 and 21, with a sample size of 4,204, and a margin of error of 1.5%. A majority of voters, 66 percent, declared themselves "anti-Ortega." In this poll, Montealegre is gaining on Ortega, and the most likely outcome is a second round runoff between these two candidates. In a second round, Montealegre would win with 44.2% of the vote -- 9 points over Ortega, 35%. Jarquin, s numbers appear to be slipping and Rizo is now in third place.

¶13. No party would have the 47 votes in the National Assembly needed to pass a law, though the FSLN would still enjoy the largest voting block, according to the results of this poll. The FSLN would win 35 deputy seats, the ALN 29, the MRS 14 and the PLC 12 (down from 40 currently).

Alliances would still be necessary in order to pass legislation. The combined votes of the PLC and FSLN would total 47 votes. Regarding the rural vote, the poll suggests that the FSLN has gained considerable ground with this segment of the population as Ortega leads with 34.9%, followed by Montealegre 24.9%, and Rizo 21.5%. (NOTE: Contacts tell us that Chavez, donation of fertilizer to the FSLN has drawn more support for Ortega.)

THE HERTY FACTOR

¶14. (C) The MRS suffered a setback in the polls with Herty Lewites' death, which they recouped in the following months as Jarquin and Carlos Mejia Godoy began actively campaigning. Recent polls, however, show their numbers may be slipping. MRS spokesman Israel Lewites is convinced that the FSLN has reached the peak of its support and that the poll numbers may decline, which will provide the MRS with an opportunity to gain ground. A bump in the polls in favor of Ortega occurred in June and his numbers appeared to have crossed the 30% threshold, though there are now indications that his numbers are beginning to decrease. Lewites believes that Ortega's numbers are overstated in the polls, because some people who claim to be FSLN supporters may only be professing their allegiance to avoid antagonizing local party members. The MRS is now actively targeting FSLN supporters to try to win their vote -- Lewites claims that they have much better chance in pulling away FSLN voters than they do Montealegre supporters. Recent advertisements speak directly to Sandinistas and portray the MRS as party that is true to Sandinista ideals. The MRS is working hard to increase its support in urban areas and among students.

¶15. (C) Edmundo Jarquin was the clear winner in an M&R poll measuring public reactions to the September 13 presidential debate sponsored by CNN en espanol and Canal 2, a Nicaraguan TV channel. According to the poll, 113,000 households in Managua tuned in to watch Edmundo Jarquin (MRS), Eduardo Montealegre (ALN), Jose Rizo (PLC) and Eden Pastora (AC) give one-minute answers to a broad set of questions ranging from economic growth strategies to Daniel Ortega's absence from the debate, to the candidates, views on abortion. Aided by his large physical presence and deep voice, Jarquin's answers were concise and well-crafted and made an impact. Although over made-up and visibly nervous at times, Montealegre placed a solid second in the debate by delivering clear, concise, on-message answers. Rizo and Pastora were unable to use the forum effectively, offered few tangible solutions, and frequently ran out of time. Lewites recently told emboffs that Jarquin's performance during the debate has resulted in several small campaign donations (around 20,000 - 30,000 each).

HAS MONTEALEGRE TURNED IT AROUND?

¶16. (C) In the June polls, support for Montealegre declined, possibly because of the internal divisions among individuals and parties forming his alliance, and a poorly defined campaign focus and message. Montealegre's numbers slipped especially in rural areas, while Ortega and Rizo gained

strength. Ortega and Rizo are still the strongest players among the rural population and Montealegre had not focused on campaigning in rural areas. In recent polls, this trend seems to have turned around. The most recent polls show an upturn in Montealegre's numbers and an increased likelihood that the race will go to a second round between Montealegre and Ortega.

¶17. (C) The more positive poll results do not indicate smooth sailing for Montealegre's campaign, however. Embassy contacts have speculated that Montealegre's numbers could still fall due to problems articulating his message and the CENIS (debt bonds) smear campaign orchestrated by his opponents. We continue to hear reports of problems with his campaign, although fewer than before. Others have noted that

the divide between the center right is likely to remain protracted because polls have undercounted the rural vote, thus PLC numbers may increase in the run-up to the elections.

COMMENT

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¶18. (C) One of the most notable trends in the polls is large number of undeclared or undecided voters, which may indicate that the people polled do not want to discuss their party affiliation or that they are undecided. The undecided vote has varied from poll to poll, ranging from a low of 5.8% to 32%. The last two polls show an undecided vote of around 7 to 10 percent. This still large segment may reflect the indecision on the part of traditional liberal voters who are torn between party loyalty and Montealegre, but mostly do not want to waste their votes, preferring to rally behind the "winning horse" that will beat Ortega. These undecided votes traditionally do not go to Ortega; they are potential votes for Montealegre or Jarquin. However, if these voters abstain from voting, Ortega could win. The next month will be critical as Montealegre and Jarquin court the undecided voters. The availability of funds, or lack thereof, may be the determinant in whether they can reach these voters, who will likely determine the outcome of the November 5 election. The next few polls may give a more accurate prediction of what will happen as these voters make their decisions.

¶19. (C) Recent polls continue to point toward two options: a win by Ortega in the first round or a second round run-off between Ortega and Montealegre. (NOTE: The INR-funded CID Gallup poll also reflects this and fits within recent trends.) At this point, an ALN-PLC alliance is unlikely. Rizo does not appear willing to cede to Montealegre, whether or not Aleman steps down. Even if Rizo did step down, the additional votes for Montealegre would be minimal and he could risk losing some of his anti-pact vote. An alliance with Jarquin also seems unlikely, though something could emerge closer to the election. When asked about a possible alliance between Montealegre and Jarquin, Lewites denied the possibility and pointed out the ideological differences between the MRS and the ALN.

¶20. (C) What also seems clear from the polls is that Montealegre is the best candidate to beat Ortega. Jarquin might be able to win in a second round over Ortega, but most likely Rizo would not. The independent vote will be key in determining the outcome of the November 5 election; 60% to 70% of independent voters (depending on the poll) reject the FSLN-PLC pact. According to recent polls, most voters believe that the pact is alive and well -- 62.4% of those polled by M&R in September. If Montealegre focuses on winning Liberal voters to ensure a runoff election and strengthens his campaign messages, he may be able to rally the undecided voters and the "anti-Ortega" vote. The September M&R poll showed that even among voters who align themselves with other parties, Montealegre is a strong candidate -- 55.2% of PLC voters and 47.% of MRS voters believe Montealegre is the best candidate to beat Ortega. Montealegre's campaign efforts should focus on the undecided and "anti-Ortega" voters with strong, clear statements and a simple refutation of the CENIS charges. END COMMENT.
TRIVELLI